STUMPTOWN™

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The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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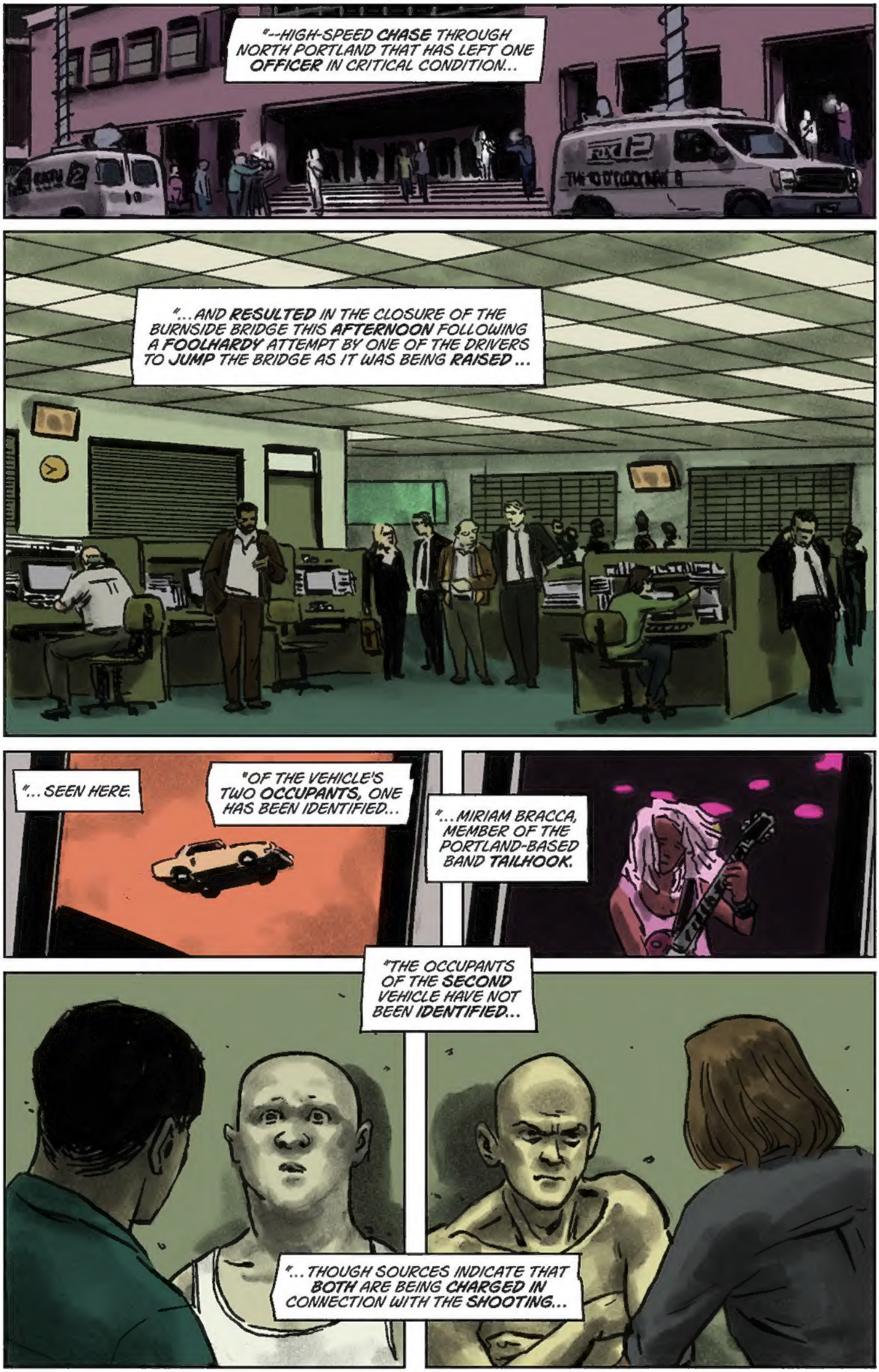
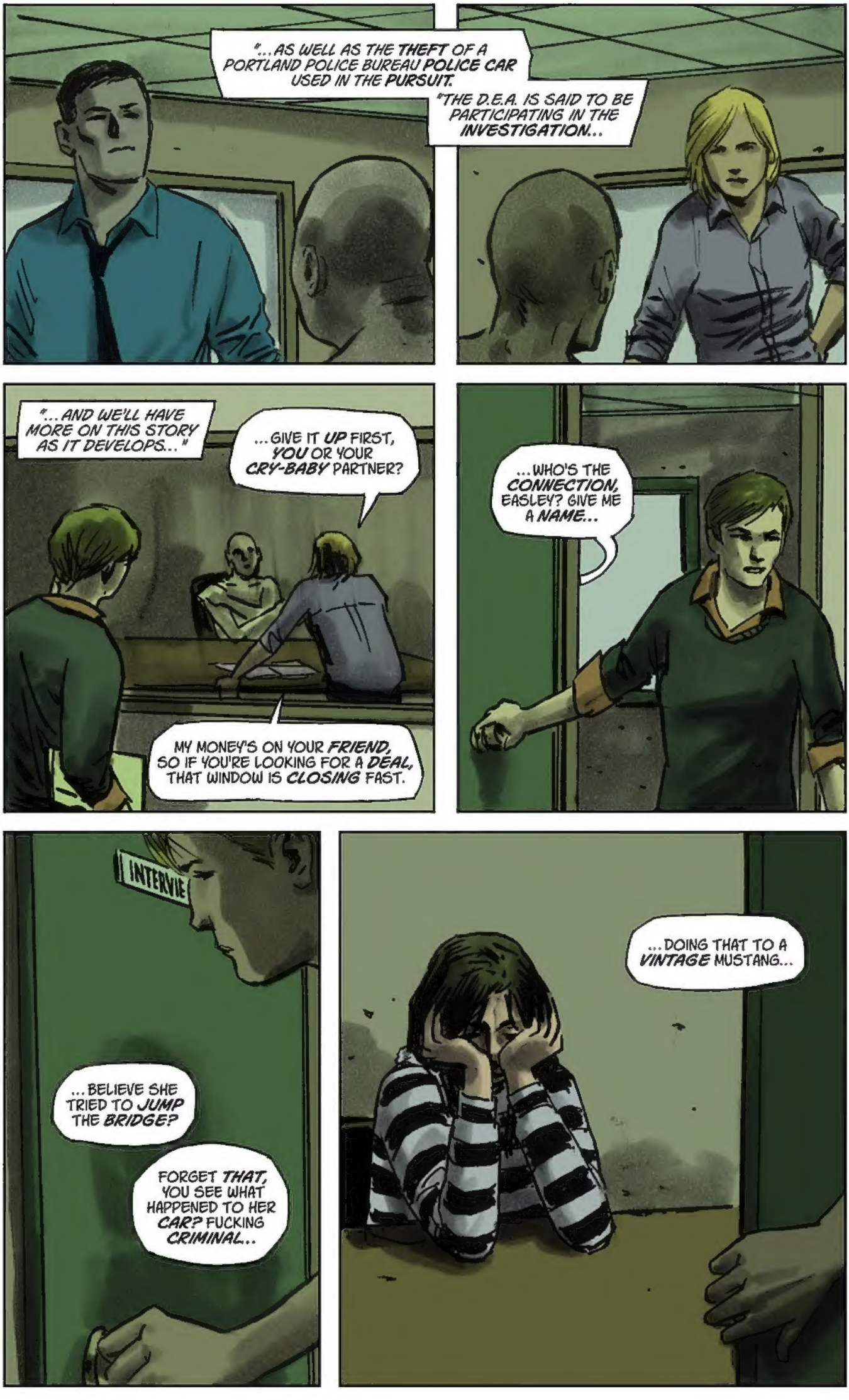
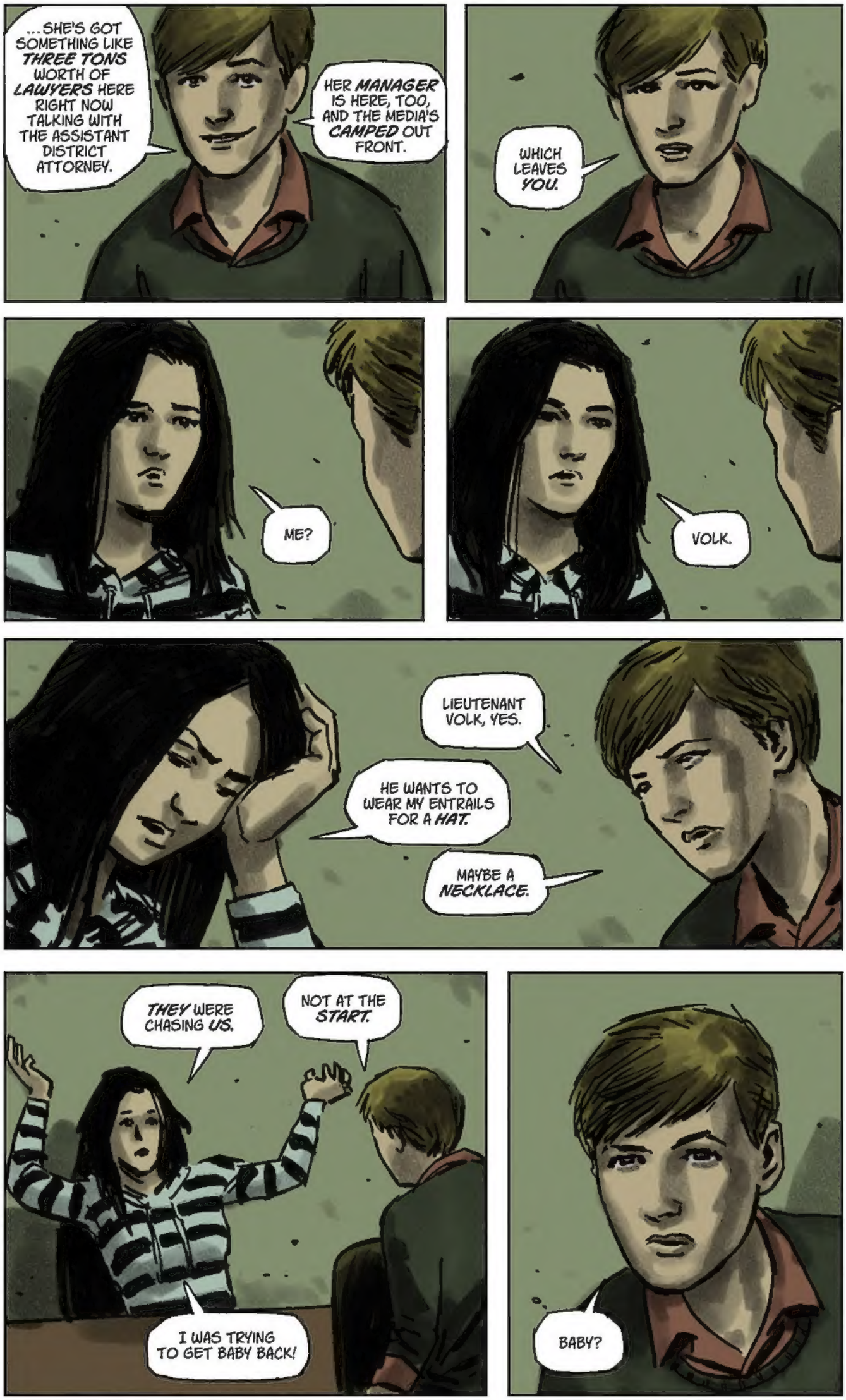
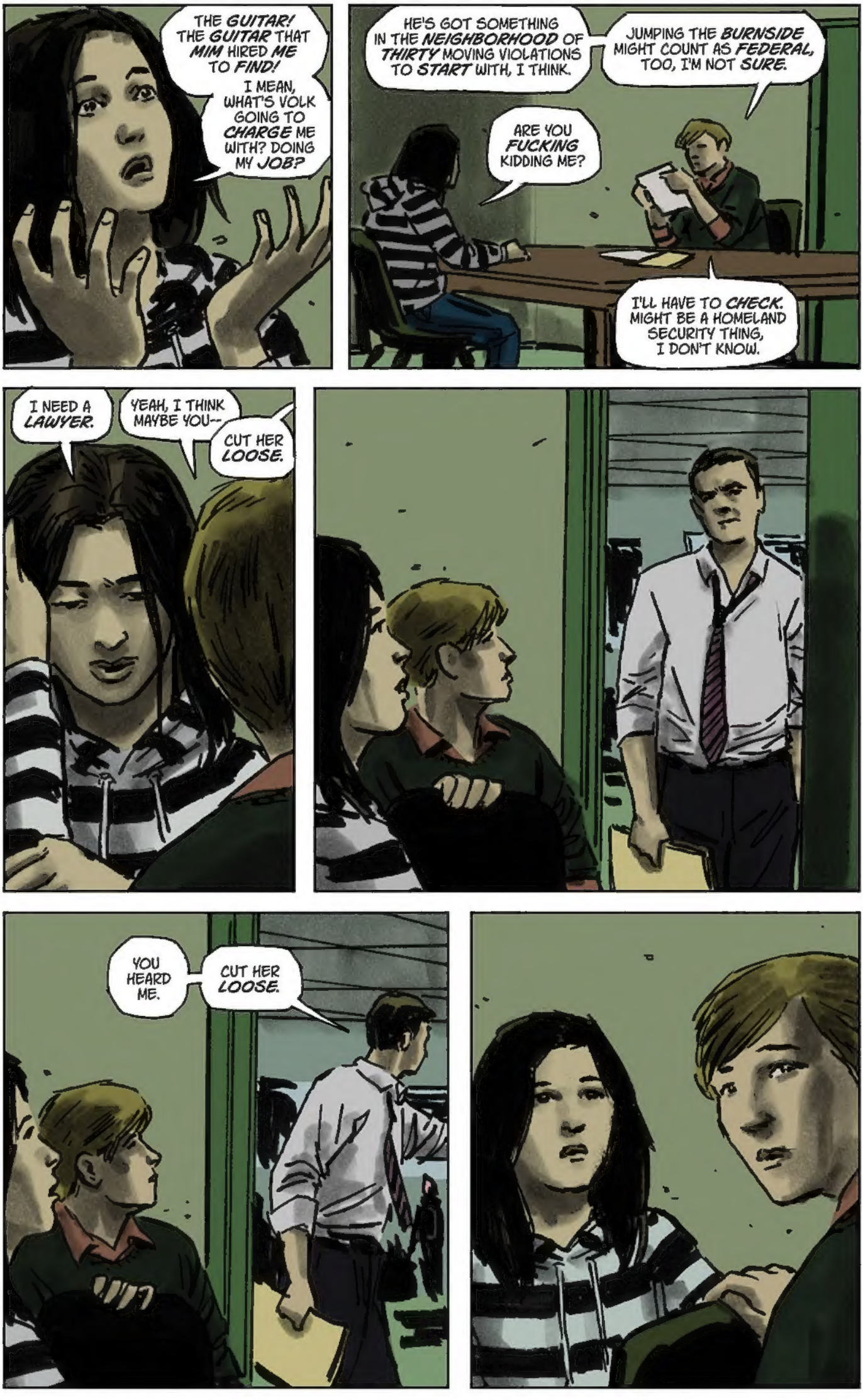

"--HIGH-SPEED CHASE THROUGH NORTH PORTLAND THAT HAS LEFT ONE OFFICER IN CRITICAL CONDITION...
"...AND RESULTED IN THE CLOSURE OF THE BURNSIDE BRIDGE THIS AFTERNOON FOLLOWING A FOOLHARDY ATTEMPT BY ONE OF THE DRIVERS TO JUMP THE BRIDGE AS IT WAS BEING RAISED...
"...SEEN HERE.
"OF THE VEHICLE'S TWO OCCUPANTS, ONE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED...
"...MIRIAM BRACCA, MEMBER OF THE PORTLAND-BASED BAND TAILHOOK.
"THE OCCUPANTS OF THE SECOND VEHICLE HAVE NOT BEEN IDENTIFIED...
"...THOUGH SOURCES INDICATE THAT BOTH ARE BEING CHARGED IN CONNECTION WITH THE SHOOTING...

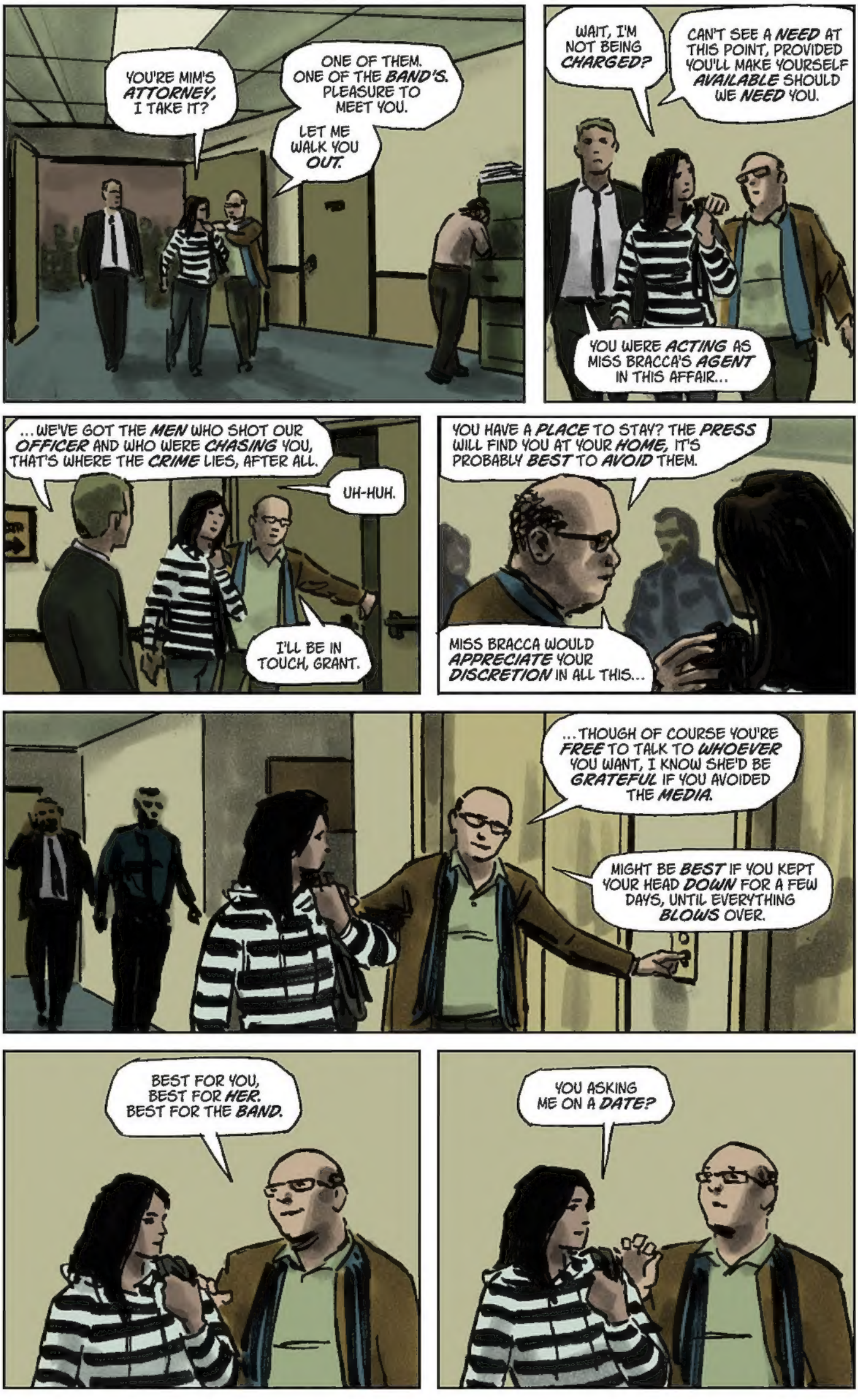

"...AS WELL AS THE THEFT OF A PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU POLICE CAR USED IN THE PURSUIT.
"THE D.E.A. IS SAID TO BE PARTICIPATING IN THE INVESTIGATION...
"...AND WE'LL HAVE MORE ON THIS STORY AS IT DEVELOPS..."
...GIVE IT UP FIRST, YOU OR YOUR CRY-BABY PARTNER?
MY MONEY'S ON YOUR FRIEND, SO IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A DEAL, THAT WINDOW IS CLOSING FAST.
...WHO'S THE CONNECTION, EASLEY? GIVE ME A NAME...
INTERVIE
...BELIEVE SHE TRIED TO JUMP THE BRIDGE?
FORGET THAT, YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO HER CAR? FUCKING CRIMINAL..
...DOING THAT TO A VINTAGE MUSTANG...

HEY, TRACY.
ANY WORD ON THE COP THEY SHOT?
RENETTO, YEAH. LOOKS LIKE HE'LL BE OKAY.
THANK GOD FOR THAT.
YOU'RE A FUCKING MORON, YOU KNOW THAT, DEX?
WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO? LET THEM GET AWAY?
YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO LET THE COPS HANDLE THIS!
SO HOW'S THIS GOING TO PLAY?
I REALLY DON'T KNOW. I REALLY DON'T.
THE D.E.A.'S WORKING YOUR SKINHEAD ADMIRERS OVER RIGHT NOW.
THE LITTLE ONE'S BAWLING LIKE A BABY, AND AGENT CHASE IS ABOUT TO HAVE THE OTHER FOR DINNER.
AS FOR MIM...

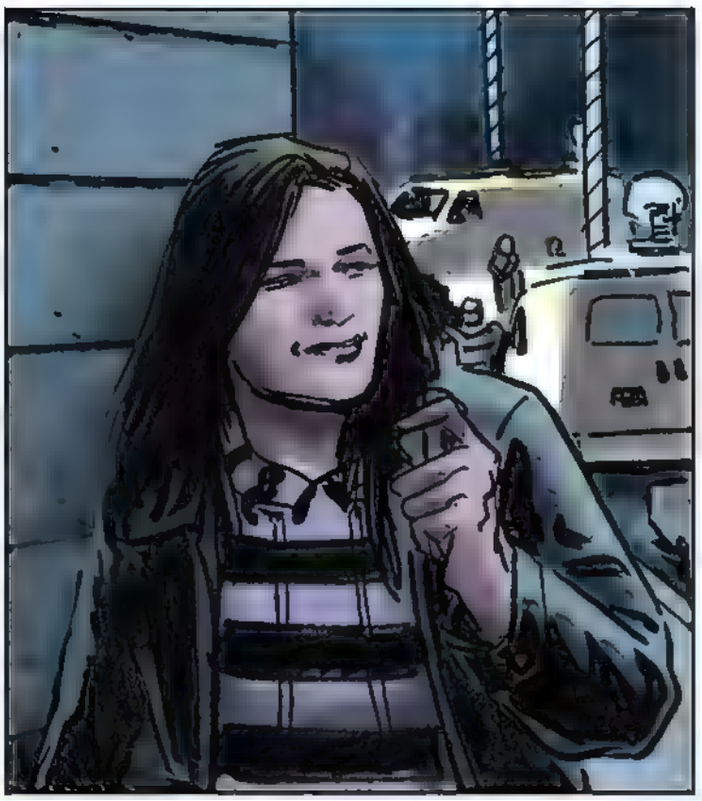

...SHE'S GOT SOMETHING LIKE *THREE TONS* WORTH OF *LAWYERS* HERE RIGHT NOW TALKING WITH THE ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY.
HER *MANAGER* IS HERE, TOO, AND THE MEDIA'S *CAMPED* OUT FRONT.
WHICH LEAVES *YOU.*
ME?
VOLK.
LIEUTENANT VOLK, YES.
HE WANTS TO WEAR MY ENTRAILS FOR A *HAT.*
MAYBE A *NECKLACE.*
THEY WERE CHASING *US.*
NOT AT THE *START.*
I WAS TRYING TO GET BABY BACK!
BABY?

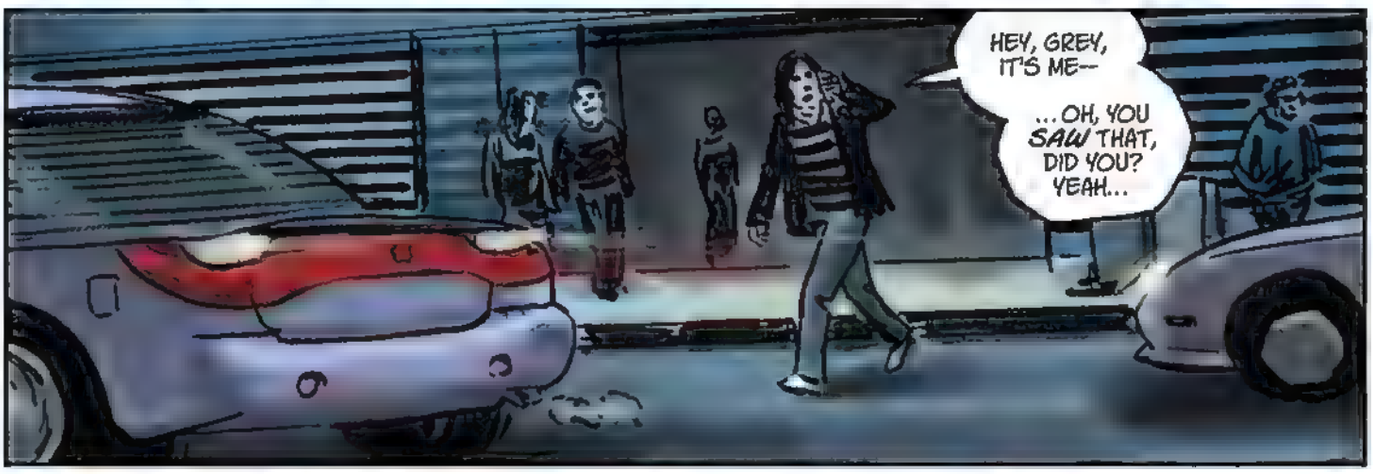

THE GUITAR! THE GUITAR THAT MIM HIRED ME TO FIND!
I MEAN, WHAT'S VOLK GOING TO CHARGE ME WITH? DOING MY JOB?
HE'S GOT SOMETHING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF THIRTY MOVING VIOLATIONS TO START WITH, I THINK.
JUMPING THE BURNSIDE MIGHT COUNT AS FEDERAL, TOO, I'M NOT SURE.
ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?
I'LL HAVE TO CHECK. MIGHT BE A HOMELAND SECURITY THING, I DON'T KNOW.
I NEED A LAWYER.
YEAH, I THINK MAYBE YOU--
CUT HER LOOSE.
YOU HEARD ME.
CUT HER LOOSE.

...COURSE BE HAPPY TO ASSIST THE INVESTIGATION IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE. JUST HAVE YOUR PEOPLE CALL MY OFFICE.
YOU'LL WANT TO TAKE THE GARAGE EXIT, WE CAN GET YOU OUT THAT WAY.
AND YOU'LL MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT MY CLIENT IS IN NO WAY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT TRANSPIRED?
ABSOLUTELY, FRED. NO MEMBER OF THE BAND IS IN ANY WAY INVOLVED IN OUR INVESTIGATION. I'LL STRESS THE POINT.
AND THE D.E.A. AGREES WITH THAT?
I'VE HEARD FROM THEIR OFFICE. THEY'VE NO INTEREST IN YOUR CLIENT.
VERY GOOD.
AND YOU MUST BE PARIOS, YES?
FRED CHAPEL.


YOU'RE MIM'S ATTORNEY, I TAKE IT?
ONE OF THEM. ONE OF THE BAND'S. PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.
LET ME WALK YOU OUT.
WAIT, I'M NOT BEING CHARGED?
CAN'T SEE A NEED AT THIS POINT, PROVIDED YOU'LL MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE SHOULD WE NEED YOU.
YOU WERE ACTING AS MISS BRACCA'S AGENT IN THIS AFFAIR...
...WE'VE GOT THE MEN WHO SHOT OUR OFFICER AND WHO WERE CHASING YOU, THAT'S WHERE THE CRIME LIES, AFTER ALL.
UH-HUH.
I'LL BE IN TOUCH, GRANT.
YOU HAVE A PLACE TO STAY? THE PRESS WILL FIND YOU AT YOUR HOME, IT'S PROBABLY BEST TO AVOID THEM.
MISS BRACCA WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR DISCRETION IN ALL THIS...
...THOUGH OF COURSE YOU'RE FREE TO TALK TO WHOEVER YOU WANT, I KNOW SHE'D BE GRATEFUL IF YOU AVOIDED THE MEDIA.
MIGHT BE BEST IF YOU KEPT YOUR HEAD DOWN FOR A FEW DAYS, UNTIL EVERYTHING BLOWS OVER.
BEST FOR YOU, BEST FOR HER. BEST FOR THE BAND.
YOU ASKING ME ON A DATE?

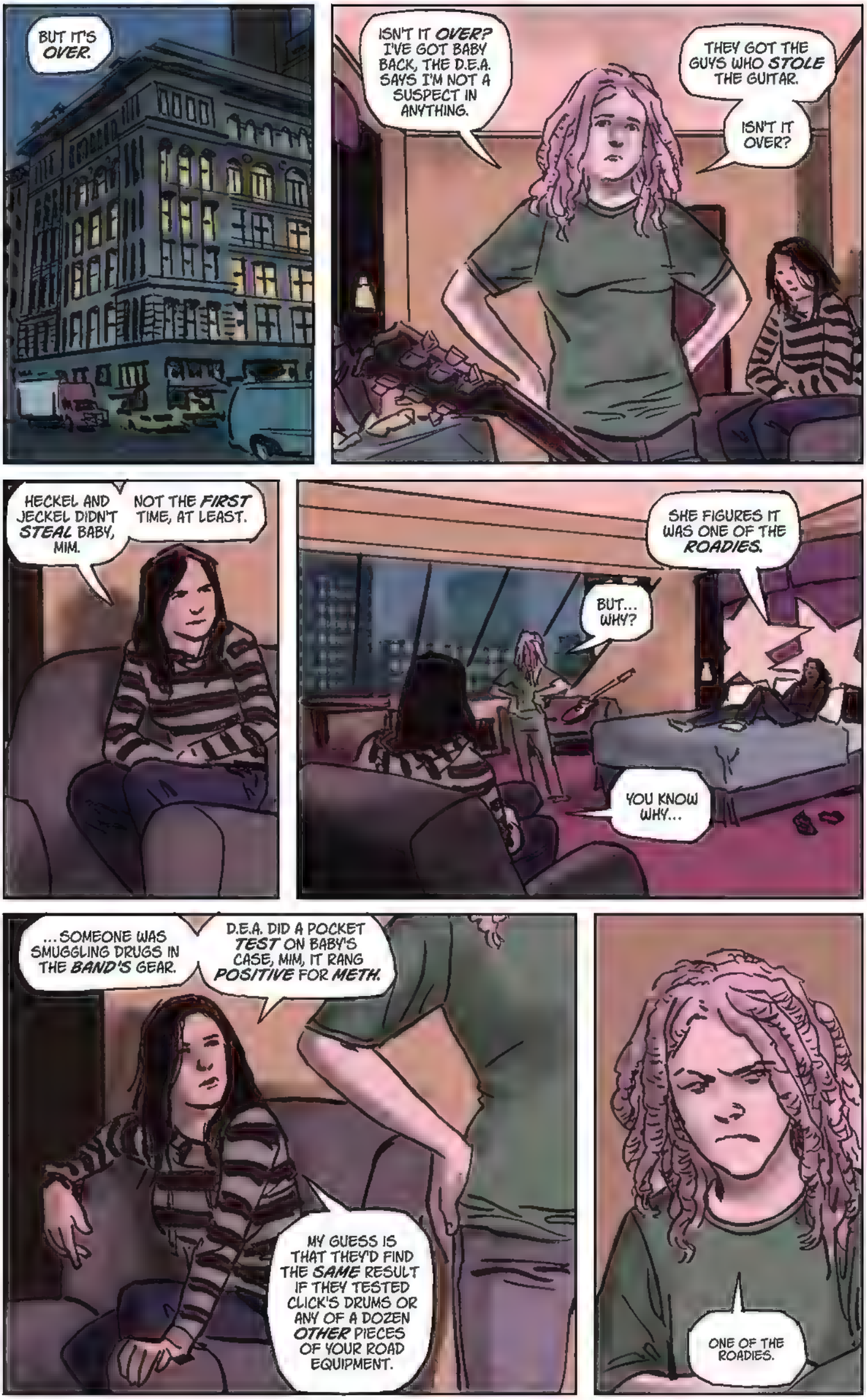
SO THAT'S A NO?
MISS BRACCA THANKS YOU FOR YOUR HELP, MISS PARIOS.
DOES SHE?
SHE HAS HER GUITAR BACK, MISS PARIOS. YOUR JOB WAS TO RETRIEVE IT FOR HER.
FROM WHERE HER MANAGEMENT STANDS, THAT MEANS YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH HER AND TAILHOOK IS FINISHED.
IT WOULD PROBABLY BE IN EVERYONE'S BEST INTERESTS IF YOU LET THINGS RUN THEIR COURSE FROM HERE ON OUT.
IT'S JUST A SUGGESTION.
I'D EXIT THE BUILDING THROUGH THE GARAGE, IF I WERE YOU.
MORE DISCREET.
NICE MEETING YOU.



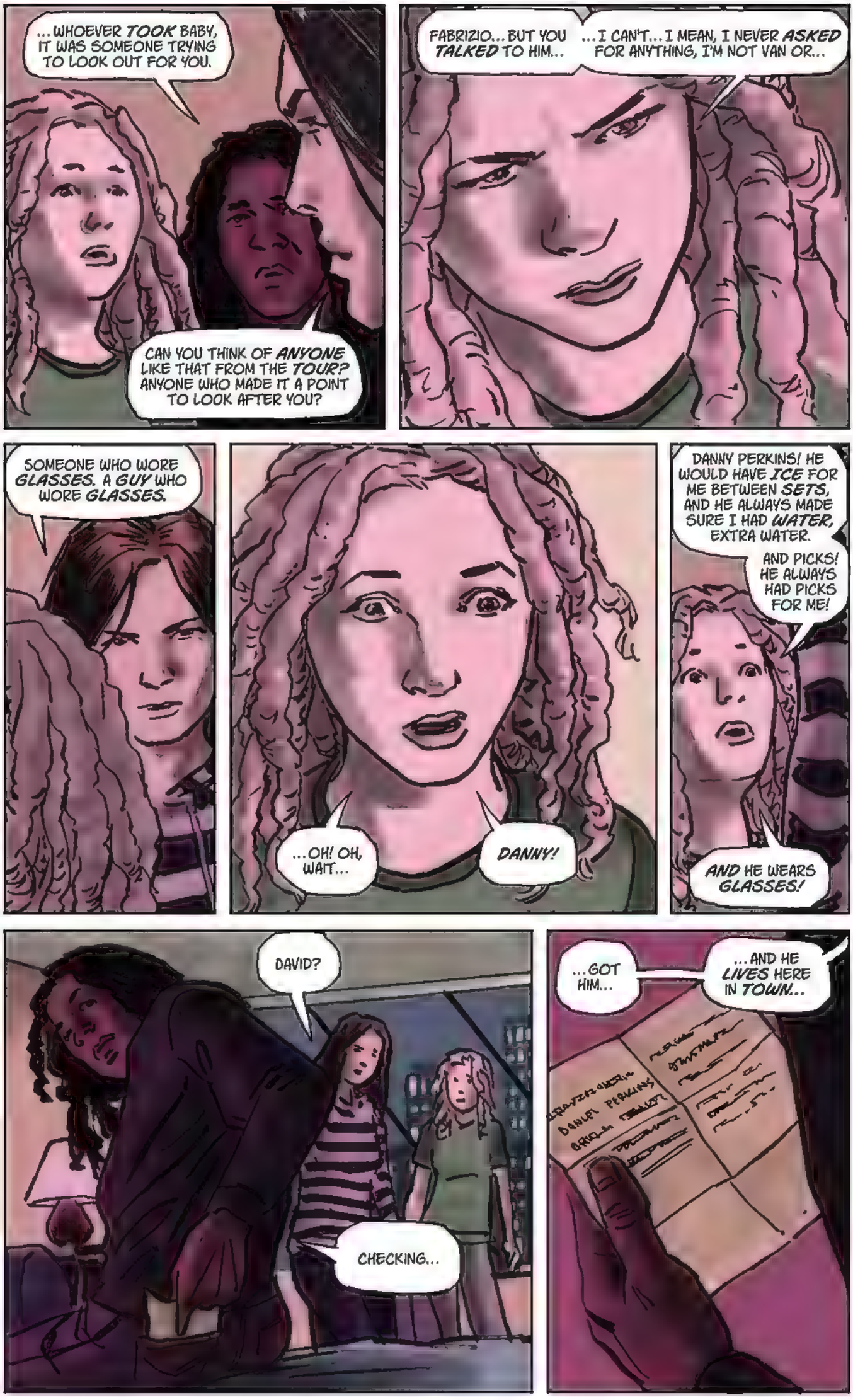

HEY, GREY, IT'S ME--
...OH, YOU SAW THAT, DID YOU? YEAH...

...OH, C'MON, LIKE YOU'VE NEVER WANTED TO TRY IT...
SO, LISTEN, I NEED A FAVOR... YES, ANOTHER ONE. CAN YOU KEEP ANSEL FOR THE NIGHT?
BEEP BEEP

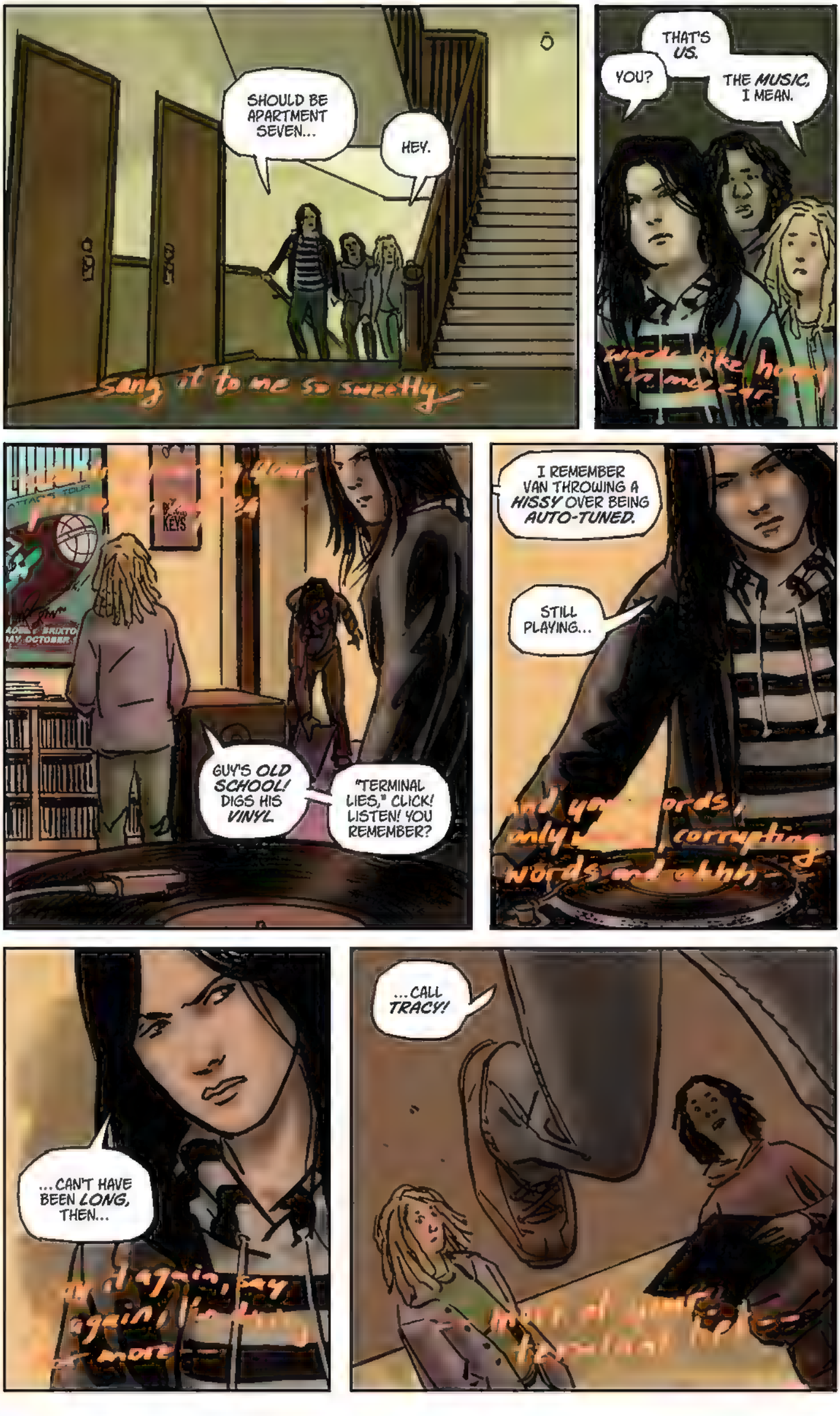
YEAH, THERE'S A CHANCE THE PRESS WILL SHOW UP AT MY PLACE, SO...
NEED A LIFT?
...THANKS, GREY, LISTEN, I'LL CALL YOU BACK.
THANKS, CLICK.
DAVID, REMEMBER?
YOU'VE GOT GOOD TIMING.
ACTUALLY, NO. I WAS WAITING FOR YOU.
REALLY?
NO LIE.
SAW IT ON THE NEWS, HUH?
AH, NO. WELL, YES, BUT I'D CALLED THE COPS FROM YOUR OFFICE AFTER YOU AND MIM BOLTED OUT OF THERE.
SO, WHERE CAN I TAKE YOU?
Jeep
YOU STILL HAVE THAT LIST OF ROADIES?
I DO, YEAH.
WHERE'S MIM?
UHM... HOLED UP AT THE VINTAGE PLAZA, I THINK.
TAKE ME THERE?
THERE'S SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS...


BUT IT'S OVER.
ISN'T IT OVER? I'VE GOT BABY BACK, THE D.E.A. SAYS I'M NOT A SUSPECT IN ANYTHING.
THEY GOT THE GUYS WHO STOLE THE GUITAR.
ISN'T IT OVER?
HECKEL AND JECKEL DIDN'T STEAL BABY, MIM.
NOT THE FIRST TIME, AT LEAST.
SHE FIGURES IT WAS ONE OF THE ROADIES.
BUT... WHY?
YOU KNOW WHY...
...SOMEONE WAS SMUGGLING DRUGS IN THE BAND'S GEAR.
D.E.A. DID A POCKET TEST ON BABY'S CASE, MIM, IT RANG POSITIVE FOR METH.
MY GUESS IS THAT THEY'D FIND THE SAME RESULT IF THEY TESTED CLICK'S DRUMS OR ANY OF A DOZEN OTHER PIECES OF YOUR ROAD EQUIPMENT.
ONE OF THE ROADIES.

NOT JUST ONE OF THE ROADIES.
SOMEONE GAVE BABY BACK. SOMEONE GAVE BABY BACK TO ME.
WHICH MEANS WHOEVER THAT WAS, HE OR SHE KNEW I WAS WORKING FOR YOU.
WHO?
AH, AND HERE WE COME TO THE QUESTION, MY DEAR.
WHO IN THE ROAD CREW WOULD STEAL YOUR GUITAR ONLY TO MAKE SURE IT GOT BACK TO YOU?
I DON'T... I MEAN, I CAN'T...
WHY WOULD SOMEONE DO THAT?
SAME REASON I CAME TO SEE DEX, HERE.
THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, ISN'T IT, DEX?
THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYING, DAVID.
I DON'T KNOW WHY CLICK WENT TO YOU.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT CLICK WENT TO YOU.
MIMSER, RELAX. I WENT TO DEX BECAUSE I WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
THAT'S WHAT SHE'S SAYING...


...WHOEVER TOOK BABY, IT WAS SOMEONE TRYING TO LOOK OUT FOR YOU.
CAN YOU THINK OF ANYONE LIKE THAT FROM THE TOUR? ANYONE WHO MADE IT A POINT TO LOOK AFTER YOU?
FABRIZIO... BUT YOU TALKED TO HIM...
...I CAN'T... I MEAN, I NEVER ASKED FOR ANYTHING, I'M NOT VAN OR...
SOMEONE WHO WORE GLASSES. A GUY WHO WORE GLASSES.
...OH! OH, WAIT...
DANNY!
DANNY PERKINS! HE WOULD HAVE ICE FOR ME BETWEEN SETS, AND HE ALWAYS MADE SURE I HAD WATER, EXTRA WATER.
AND PICKS! HE ALWAYS HAD PICKS FOR ME!
AND HE WEARS GLASSES!
DAVID?
CHECKING...
...GOT HIM...
...AND HE LIVES HERE IN TOWN...
DANIEL PERKINS

NOK
NOK
NOK


SHOULD BE APARTMENT SEVEN...
HEY.
sang it to me so sweetly
THAT'S US.
YOU?
THE MUSIC, I MEAN.
KEYS
GUY'S OLD SCHOOL! DIGS HIS VINYL
"TERMINAL LIES," CLICK! LISTEN! YOU REMEMBER?
I REMEMBER VAN THROWING A HISSY OVER BEING AUTO-TUNED.
STILL PLAYING...
...CAN'T HAVE BEEN LONG, THEN...
...CALL TRACY!

CAN'T HAVE GONE FAR, CAN'T HAVE GONE FAR...
...UNLESS THEY LEFT IN A CAR IN WHICH CASE THEY HAVE GONE FAR AND I'M TOTALLY FUCKED...
...WHICH WOULD BE PAR FOR THE COURSE, REALLY, WAY THINGS HAVE BEEN GOING...
...WAY THINGS HAVE BEEN...
...GOING...

KOF KOFF I D-DON'T--
I HOPE YOU'RE LYING, KID, I REALLY DO.
THERE WERE FIVE POUNDS OF CRYSTAL IN THAT CASE.
THAT'S FIVE POUNDS BELONGING TO ME THAT YOU STOLE.
YOU KNOW HOW MUCH FIVE POUNDS OF CRYSTAL IS WORTH?
ALMOST HALF A MILLION DOLLARS, THAT'S HOW MUCH.
SO I'M ASKING YOU AGAIN...
...WHERE'S MY CRYSTAL, BOY?
D-DON'T UNDERSTAND I D-DIDN'T... DIDN'T MEAN TO...
...FOUND IT BY ACCIDENT...
...DIDN'T WANT ANYTHING ...ANYTHING TO HAPPEN TO THE BAND...
...WAS TRYING TO PROTECT THE B-BAND...

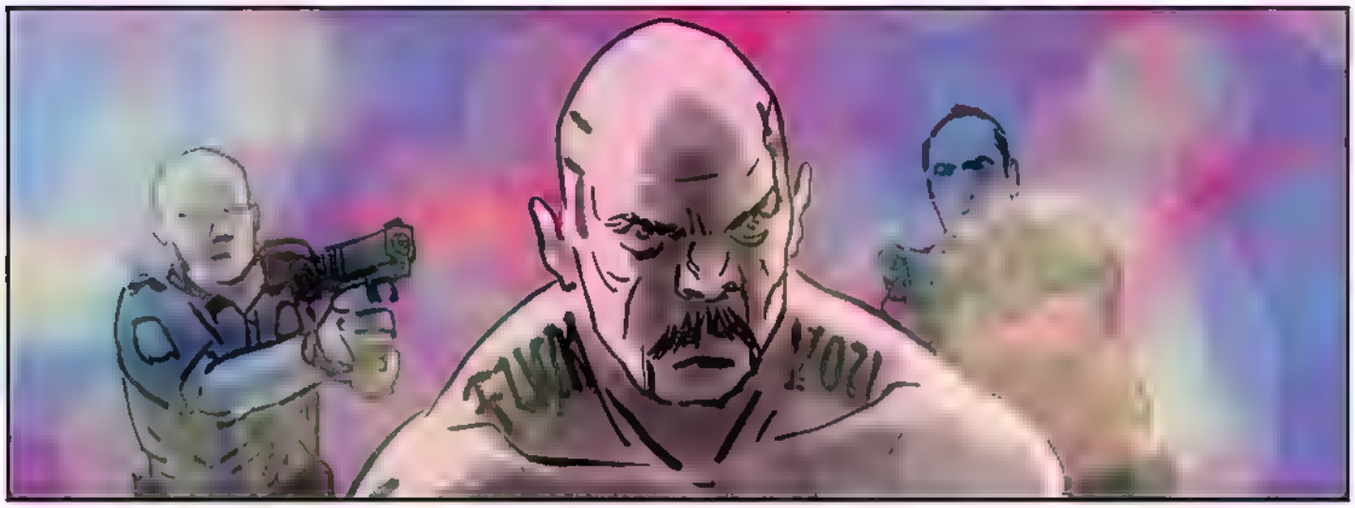
WHERE'S MY CRYSTAL!
YOU FUCKING LIMP-DICK MOTHERFUCKER, WHERE'S MY STUFF?!?
YOU
HE GAVE IT TO ME.
I HAVE IT.
5150
LET HIM GO AND I'LL TAKE YOU TO IT.

YOU'LL TAKE ME TO IT? YOU WILL?
AND WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?
NO, I DON'T CARE. YOU KNOW WHAT? I DON'T FUCKING CARE.
AND NO, I WILL NOT LET HIM GO AND YES, YOU WILL TELL ME WHERE IT IS RIGHT NOW...
...OR I WILL MAKE YOU TELL ME, YES, I WILL DO THAT, LITTLE BITCH.
SHIT.
OKAY, ALL RIGHT, I'LL TAKE YOU TO IT...

YOU KNOW WHAT I DO IF YOU'RE LYING TO ME?
GOT A PRETTY GOOD IDEA, YEAH.
THAT'S IT, IT'S IN THE JEEP.
GET IT.
GO ON, GET IT.
NOW, THAT IS A BIG FUCKING GUN...

...BUT MINE'S BIGGER.

D.E.A.
JAMES LLWELLYN, YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.
DROP THE GUN, ASSHOLE.

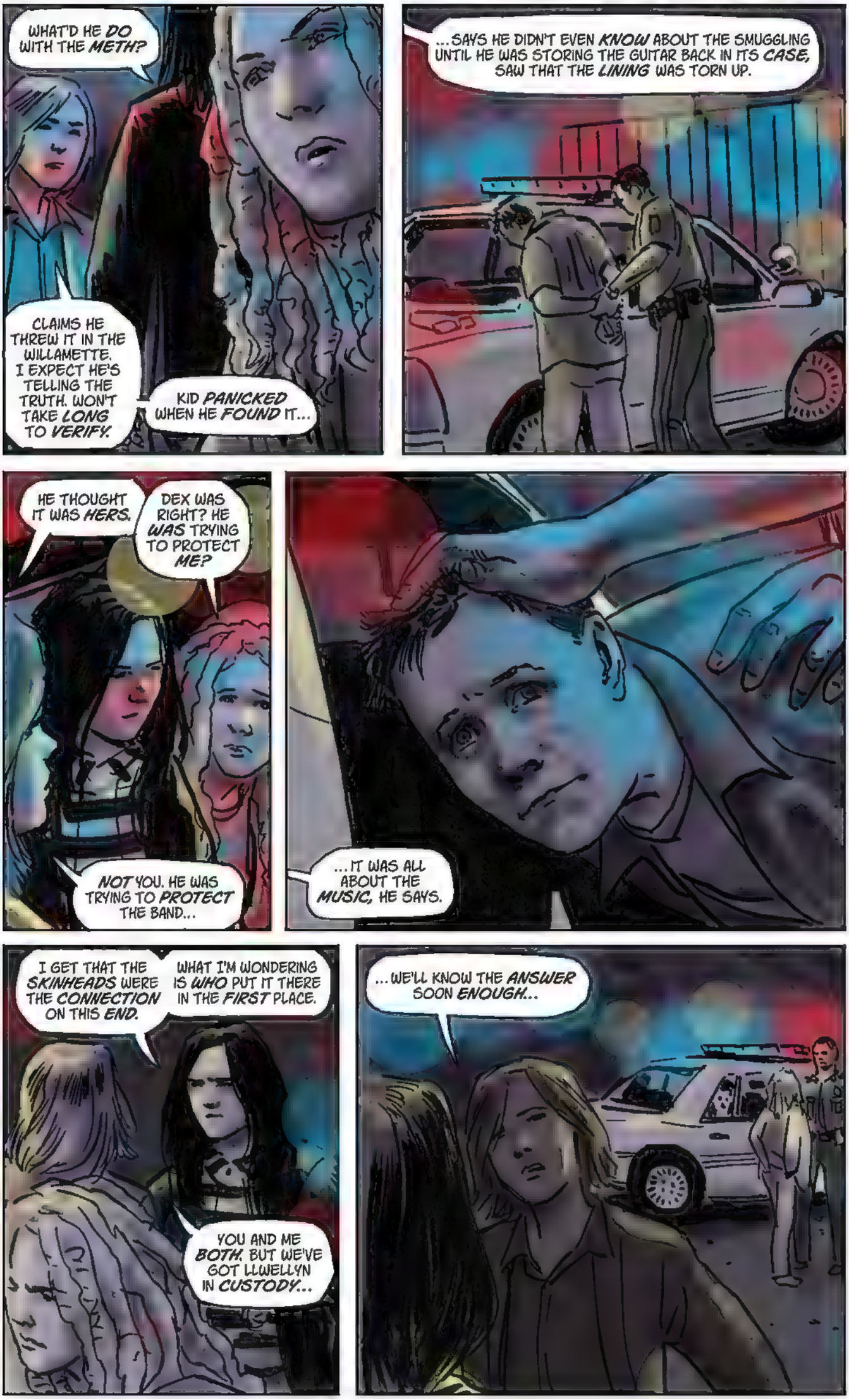


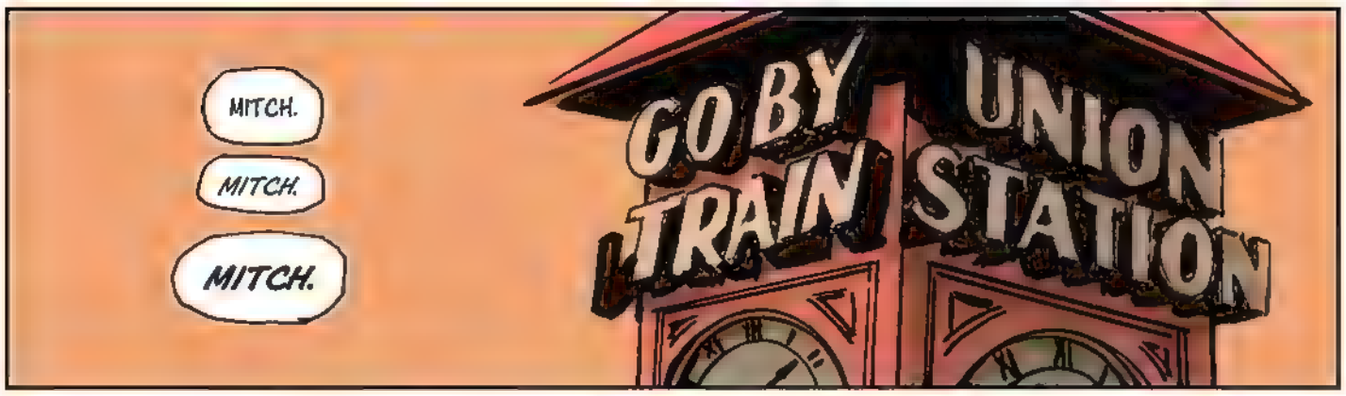
YOU TOLD HIM IT WAS IN *MY* JEEP?
I KNEW YOU GUYS HAD CALLED TRACY. SEEMED THE BEST BET.
226 PES

BETTER THAN SHOOTING IT OUT WITH THEM, I GUESS.
ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN SHOOTING IT OUT, CLICK.
BELIEVE ME.
WHAT'RE THEY DOING WITH DANNY?

THEY'RE *ARRESTING* HIM.
BUT HE GAVE BABY *BACK!*
HEY, *MORON.*

I ASSUME YOU MEAN *ME,* AGENT CHASE?
YES, YOU. THAT WAS *FUCKING* STUPID OF YOU.
BUT IT WORKED OUT.


WHAT'D HE DO WITH THE METH?
CLAIMS HE THREW IT IN THE WILLAMETTE. I EXPECT HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH. WON'T TAKE LONG TO VERIFY.
KID PANICKED WHEN HE FOUND IT...
...SAYS HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT THE SMUGGLING UNTIL HE WAS STORING THE GUITAR BACK IN ITS CASE, SAW THAT THE LINING WAS TORN UP.
HE THOUGHT IT WAS HERS.
DEX WAS RIGHT? HE WAS TRYING TO PROTECT ME?
NOT YOU. HE WAS TRYING TO PROTECT THE BAND...
...IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC, HE SAYS.
I GET THAT THE SKINHEADS WERE THE CONNECTION ON THIS END.
WHAT I'M WONDERING IS WHO PUT IT THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE.
YOU AND ME BOTH. BUT WE'VE GOT LLWELLYN IN CUSTODY...
...WE'LL KNOW THE ANSWER SOON ENOUGH...

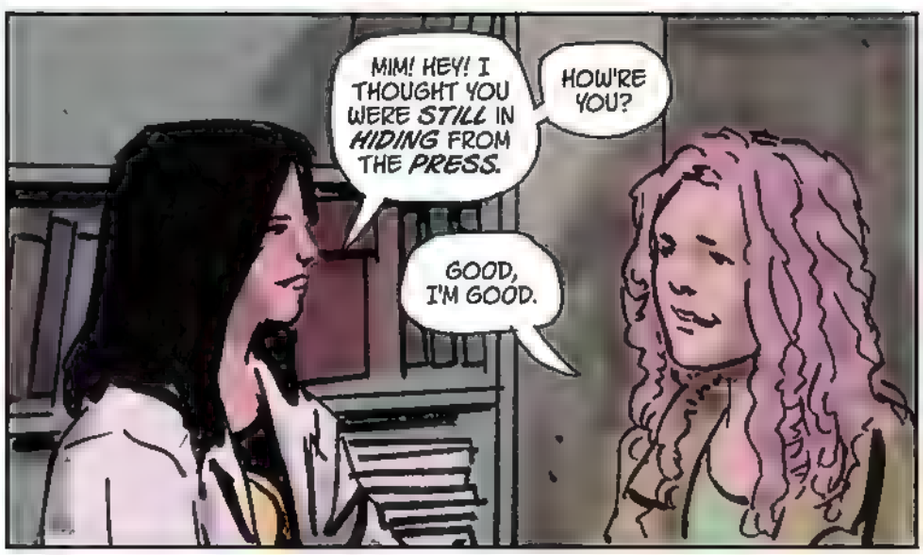

MITCH.
MITCH.
MITCH.
GO BY TRAIN
UNION STATION

I KNOW SHE'S TOTALED, I'M ASKING YOU HOW MUCH IT'LL COST TO FIX HER.

...THAT MUCH?
...NO...

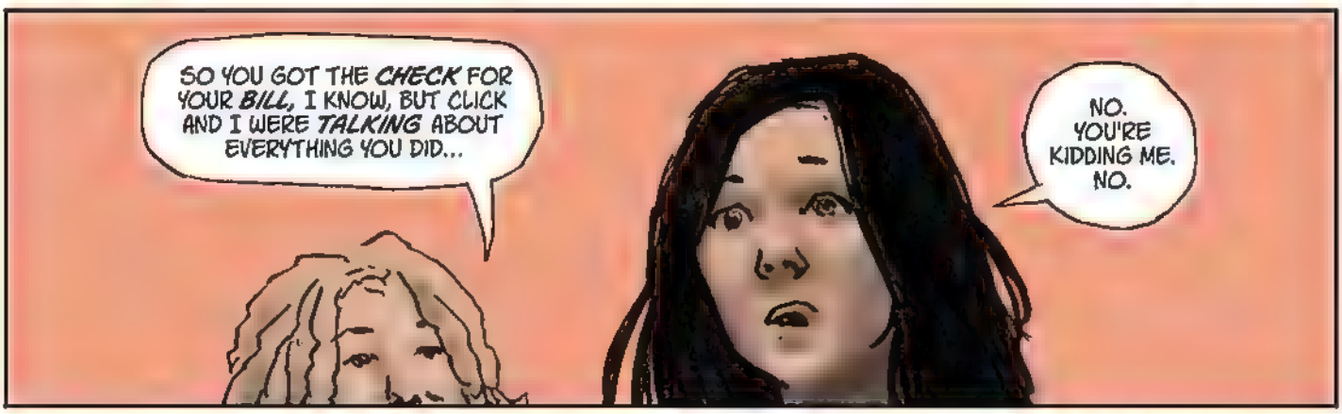
...I'LL HAVE TO GET BACK TO YOU...

HEY.


MIM! HEY! I THOUGHT YOU WERE STILL IN HIDING FROM THE PRESS.
HOW'RE YOU?
GOOD, I'M GOOD.

COME WITH ME, I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.

MIM--
JUST FOLLOW ME, OKAY?


SO YOU GOT THE CHECK FOR YOUR BILL, I KNOW, BUT CLICK AND I WERE TALKING ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU DID...
NO. YOU'RE KIDDING ME. NO.

...AND WE DECIDED YOU DESERVE A BONUS.

I...
...I...
...I...
...I...
...UH...
...A BETTER PERSON WOULD REFUSE.
I AM NOT THAT BETTER PERSON.
GOOD.
HERE. YOU TWO SHOULD GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.
SEE YOU AROUND, GUMSHOE.

KRRNCH
OH, GOD! OH, GOD, WOW, I'M SORRY...
...I THOUGHT I HAD THE TURN, I'M SORRY...
...YOU CAN GET THAT REPAIRED, RIGHT? YOU CAN GET THAT REPAIRED...

"...IT'S ONLY MONEY, RIGHT?"
MR. MARENCO?
TELL ME.
WE LOST THE SHIPMENT. HALF A MILLION DOLLARS WORTH.
D.E.A. HAS LLWELLYN IN CUSTODY.
CAN HE HURT US?
NO, SIR.
SEE WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT A REPLACEMENT.
ALREADY WORKING ON.
GOOD.
WILLIAM?
YES, MISTER MARENCO?
FIND OUT WHAT WENT WRONG.
THEN MAKE SURE IT NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN.
YES, SIR.

WHY P.I.? PART FIVE
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE WONDERING WHY I GATHERED YOU ALL HERE...

From the theory to the practical, now, which will, in turn, lead us back to the theoretical. Throughout these little essays, I've tried to remove myself from the equation, in some perhaps-poorly-conceived nod to academic discourse. I've tried to keep myself out of it, because, frankly, as much as I believe everything I've put forth thus far, I don't always agree with it. Witness the assertion by Raymond Chandler back in Part Two of these, that the crime in question must be murder, and you'll see what I mean. Hell, we're two cases in on Stumptown, and there's yet to be a body floating in the river.

Which, I should add, doesn't mean it's not coming. It just hasn't caught the current yet, so to speak.

And this leads us to the last piece of the PI puzzle: the Crime. Chandler argued that the crime must be murder, because murder is the ultimate crime — it is the theft not just of life, but of all that builds upon it; the theft of potential, the theft of the future, the theft of that which can never be replaced. It is a crime not solely against the individual, but against the society, against humanity, and against the world.

Give that a moment and consider it, please. We tend, in our modern modes of entertainment, to take murder for granted; we see it dramatized most everywhere we look; it has become the default crime, so to speak. I'm not railing against that, mind you; when you give it the due it deserves, it's about as powerful a force as any you can find in entertainment.

Tell you a story: back when I was writing my second novel, after failing to get the first one published, my then-literary agent and I had an argument. In the novel, a young woman had been murdered, and my stalwart protagonist, in the course of his duties, was seeking justice for the crime. My then-literary agent came back to me after an early draft and told me, and I quote, "You need to add a bomb."

"A bomb?"

"Yes, a bomb. An explosion. Something big, like that. You've got to make it bigger. Kill more people. Make it really matter."

I remember this moment distinctly, actually. I was sitting at my desk, on the phone, and I remember thinking about this, and then asking why the murder of this character wasn't enough to propel the story. Why it was that the death of an innocent couldn't be motive enough.

"Because it just isn't," he said.

I caved, I admit it. I was desperate and hungry, so I met him half-way, and I added a bomb, but I qualified it - the damn thing never actually went off.

What does this have to do with the Crime? Nothing, and everything. Chandler's assertion, I believe, comes from the relationship of Murder to Society, i.e., if the theft of life can occur, then the society is thus flawed. Any world where Cain can kill Abel is a world that needs work, so to speak.

Fair enough.

But why must it end there? A world where a parent must steal to feed a child is just as flawed, surely? A world where one threatening an individual's secrets for money, or services, is just as flawed, surely? A world where a man feels he must keep his love for another man secret is just as flawed, surely?

I mean, let's face it: we've got a long way to go before Peace and Harmony win the day. In point of fact, the likelihood is that Peace and Harmony are never going to win the day.

Which is more the point, I think. Because for all the PI is, and all the PI represents, these stories - with all their sordid details and reprehensible people and tragic motivations and lurid scenarios - are, in one sense, aspirational. Even at the most hard-boiled, there is a yearning for the better world.

In this, perhaps, the PI represents what is to me a most precious commodity, and one that is in desperately short supply in our modern world. The PI is an agent of Hope.

Yeah, yeah, okay.

###

I write bad mysteries. I always have. I'm a reasonably logical person, but I am not a puzzle person. I genuinely don't care if you figure out whodunnit before I reveal it in the story, and, frankly, I don't have a lot of respect for those writers who build the entirety of their stories on that reveal. I have even less respect for those writers who, upon discovering that a reader has gotten to the reveal ahead of him, subsequently change the ending.

Solving the puzzle is not the story; the journey is. How the PI gets there is. And what they do along the way, what they are willing to do, what they must confront and overcome, that is the measure of their character. That is the story. Attaining that end in a satisfactory, even moving, fashion, that's the goal. If I can trick you or mislead you, fantastic, I'll take it. But that's not why I'm here. I'm here to tell you a story, to entertain you, and—if I can—maybe give you a little something to think about, something that will haunt you, something that will move you.

People ask why I love the PI. There's your answer, because if there's a better form, a better character, to tell stories that will do that, I've yet to find it.

###

You've all been very patient with me through this. I leave you with this last, small, offering, cribbed from the great Denny O'Neil's run on *The Question*. A small reading list, my personal favorites of the genre. Many of these live in memory, and I'm almost certain more

than a few would collapse upon revisit. I share them here with the innocence I had when I discovered them.

Eight Million Ways to Die by Lawrence Block. One of a handful of still-living Mystery Writers of America Grandmasters. Many think Block's best Scudder novel is *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes*, but I prefer this one—it's the most heartfelt of his "early" novels, and may be one of the only "true" PI novels ever, at least in regards to the mystery itself.

The Long Goodbye by Raymond Chandler. If you've never read Chandler, don't read this first - start with *The Big Sleep*, or *The Lady in the Lake*. But when you've tasted early Chandler, crack this one, and be blown away. The entire novel is telegraphed in the opening sentence.

The Hot Rock by Donald Westlake. Westlake's protagonist, Dortmunder, isn't a PI. He's a thief, but unlike the Parker novels (which Westlake created and wrote under the pen name Richard Stark), these are lighter, funnier faire. Everyone in Dortmunder's crew is an outsider, and Westlake's deft hand at illuminating the foibles of society from their perspective is a joy.

Red Harvest by Dashiell Hammett. The nameless Continental Op heads into the untamed west and leaves a bloody swath. Not bad for a guy who's described as "pudgy" and who wears glasses. The Op is arguably the prototype for every hard-boiled detective to follow. He appears in multiple novels and short stories (*The Dain Curse* is a good choice if you can't find *Red Harvest*).

Early Autumn, by Robert B. Parker. This is the seventh Spenser novel, and I pick it out of memory as much as anything else. His fourth, *Promised Land*, won the MWA's best novel, so that's a fine jumping on point, but, of course, it's a series, so shouldering through the first, *The Godwulf Manuscript* - which reads more as a Chandler pastiche than a Spenser novel - is worth doing if you're a completist. As an aside, 1981's *A Savage Place*, was huge inspiration in the creation of my own character, Atticus Kodiak.

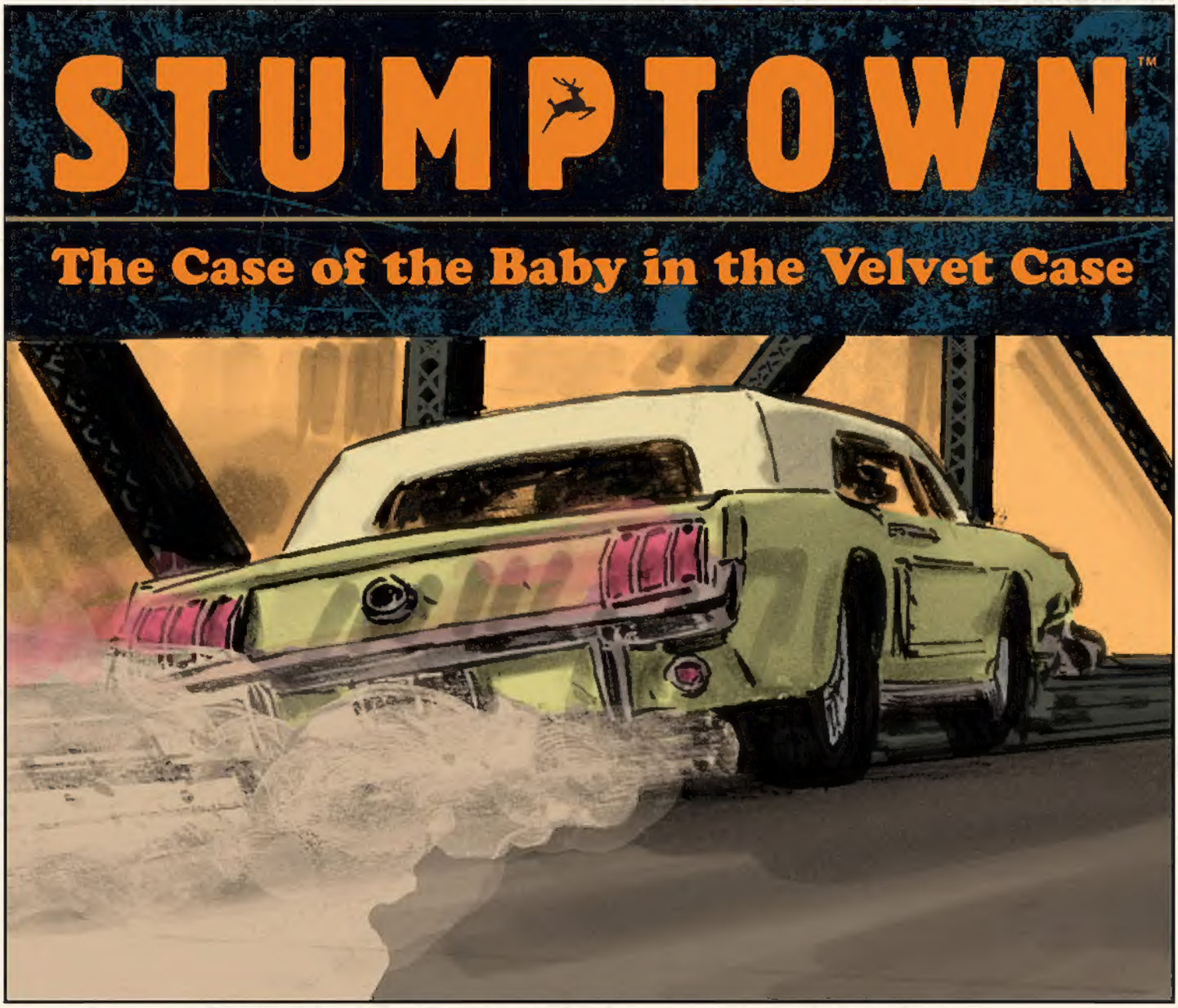
Blood Shot, by Sara Paretsky. A V.I. Warshawski mystery, and my personal favorite of the series. Starting with *Indemnity Only* might be wise if you're new to Vic. Sue Grafton's got Kinsey Milhone, but for me... well, I think Kinsey's a wuss.

There are others, ohh, so many others... I'm already over my word count on this, and I need to wrap it up, or else you'll be reading about the PI Nut Who Was Clubbed By His Editor and Still Blew His Deadline.

But, for the record, if I suddenly go missing one day, I'd ask about James Lucas Jones' whereabouts at the time of my disappearance...

Watch your backs.

GREG RUCKA, PORTLAND, OREGON



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